

CONFIDENTIAL*sent to Swanson
19 Jan. in
Executive Files*

7 January 1959

Mr. J.T. Campbell
Head of Monitoring Service
The British Broadcasting Service
Caversham Park, Reading, Berks.

Dear John:

This letter will attempt to answer some of the questions raised during my brief visit to Caversham early in December. As you suspected, operations have been carried on with a great deal of difficulty at times. For a long period use of private vehicles was banned, and all personnel had to ride Station buses. This was done partly as a safety measure but also to assure passage through road blocks and during curfews. Bus schedules had to be strictly adhered to which meant that a late evening bus could be held over for only the most urgent material. The whole staff is to be commended for its devotion to duty during such trying times. Not a program was lost. As you have seen in copy and in the newspapers, the political situation improved greatly during December even to the point where most travel restrictions were lifted. There is now much optimism, and all hope that a permanent solution will at last be found.

It was due to the resignation of a teletypist early in October that the 0100-0500 GMT gap in communications occurred. Partly because of the situation, this vacancy could not immediately be filled. It was thought that it would be better to have no teletypist at all during a four-hour period five times a week when there was no material being processed by monitors than to reduce the number on another shift. On rare occasions the rigid bus schedule made it necessary to hold routine material until the following morning. Approximately 15 January the newly hired teletypist will have completed his training, and the machines will be manned 24 hours a day.

As far as I can determine there is no criticism of Cable & Wireless at all. Radio outages continue to plague us at times, being as much as six hours on 17 December, but there is no indication that these are caused by anything but poor propagation conditions. C & W has been helpful. A little over two weeks ago they offered to run some of our traffic on a second circuit in order to get rid of a backlog. This was not feasible, however, as London could not man that end of the circuit. I was at first worried that such a procedure would lead to extra costs. They assured me that it would not, but this seems doubtful if additional help were necessary. I do not believe that this will be offered again except possibly as a substitute for the normal line should this fail because of something other than reception.

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From my short period of observation I believe that the Bureau editors and their supervisors are intelligent, conscientious, and competent. This does not mean that there will not be mistakes in judgment (as what editorial section does not make mistakes?) but I think that these will be few. FBIS Headquarters is, of course, as interested as BBC in receiving properly selected, well-edited copy. Attention of the editors has been called to the quality of Arabic copy, and attempts will be made to raise the standards of the new Arabic monitors. I was surprised to find that of the 14-man section all but three joined the Bureau since my departure a little over three years ago.

In filing, Arab material has priority over all other routine items. Your staff will have noticed that there has been a greater volume of material filed from the Arab News Agency and that routine Arab World items are being filed more quickly than before. Both were under way before my arrival, being the result of Sassaman's and Chandler's exchange of messages with Caversham. Arab briefs, many of which you would like to have fairly quickly, still present a problem both because they are marginal from our point of view and are therefore given delayed processing and because there is a reluctance to send them singly since Washington prefers to have them in groups and since singly means additional message headings. I am sure, however, we can come closer to giving you what you need.

For your use we have begun filing each shift a list of unprocessed commentaries from Arab transmitters. Although it is expected that occasionally items will be ordered, it would be appreciated if requests were made for something less than full text when possible.

The question of Soviet Regional and Arab transmitter coverage is too involved to be discussed here. We are, however, looking into both thoroughly to be ready for discussions at the next coordination meeting.

Your 31 December letter arrived just after I had finished drafting the above. We will await further word from you on the trial material. As to the second paragraph, we will watch for the specified material and text it when received. Transcription of the complete cast is beyond our capabilities, particularly since texts of East Berlin commentaries in this language are being requested so often by BBC.

It was good to renew acquaintances in Caversham and I am looking forward to seeing you and your staff again. Both Elsie and I enjoyed the evening with you and your wife and hope that both of you will be able to visit us in Cyprus. Best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely,

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Chief, Mediterranean Bureau, FBIS